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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000452

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR AF/S;
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [PINS](#) [LT](#)
SUBJECT: LESOTHO: RSA REPORTEDLY GRANTS ASYLUM TO ACCUSED COUP
PLOTTERS

REF: A) MASERU 439; B) MASERU 436; C) MASERU 428; D) MASERU 385

MASERU 00000452 001.2 OF 002

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Republic of South Africa has reportedly granted temporary asylum to six Basotho men accused by the GOL of involvement in alleged coup plotting. Two of the men claim torture, and in a recent press interview all denied any involvement in attacks on ministerial residences. The South African High Commission in Maseru told Emboff that they have not been officially informed of the asylum cases, but that they had no reason to doubt that temporary asylum had been granted. On July 27, representatives of diplomatic missions viewed recently recovered weapons, including Israeli-made Galilee rifles stolen from LDF guards during the June 2007 attacks. The asylum cases and aggressive reporting from media outlets may soon force the GOL to come to terms with fact that the Galilee rifles were not found in the hands of members of the opposition All Basotho Congress (ABC) party, but in the hands of more obscure groups with less explored grievances. END SUMMARY.

South Africa Reportedly Grants Asylum
To Six Accused in June 2007 Attacks

12. (U) According to published reports, six Basotho men whom the GOL accuse of involvement in alleged coup plotting have been granted temporary asylum by the Republic of South Africa. The men deny involvement in the attacks, and two state that the Lesotho Defense Force (LDF) tortured them at Makoanyane Military Hospital (reftel D). The men are Mokherane Tsatsanyane (age 33); Khotso Lebakeng (age 45); Pakiso Semoli (age 46); Motlomelo Motlomelo (age 36); and two former soldiers and bodyguards for ABC leader Thomas Thabane: Makotoko Lerotholi (age 58) and Thabo Thantsi (age 36). Local English-language newspaper "Public Eye" interviewed the six men in Bloemfontein, South Africa, and published their accounts on July 27. All six denied any knowledge of or involvement in the June 2007 attacks on ministerial residences.

13. (SBU) When contacted by post, South African Deputy High Commissioner Albert Wanich stated that the South African High

Commission in Maseru had not been informed by Pretoria of the asylum cases, but that he had no reason to doubt that temporary asylum had been granted. He noted that the South African Department of Home Affairs had jurisdiction over such cases, and that it would not be unusual for the High Commission to be "out of the loop." Wanich stated that he would share word with post when the High Commission had received official word on the matter from Pretoria.

The Maseru Gun Show

¶4. (U) On July 27, the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS) invited the heads of Maseru's resident diplomatic missions to view weapons recovered by the police and the Lesotho Defense Force (LDF) during recent operations. These weapons included the eight recently recovered Israeli-made Galilee rifles stolen from LDF guards at ministerial residences in June 2007 (reftel B). Charge was joined by representatives of resident diplomatic missions, and the GOL was represented by Minister of Local Government Sekatle, LDF Commander Motanyane, Police Commissioner Letooane, and Deputy Police Commissioner Mhlakaza.

¶5. (U) After a short briefing by Deputy Police Commissioner Mhlakaza, the diplomats viewed a collection of automatic weapons (including the Galilee rifles), semiautomatic weapons and handguns. Mhlakaza stated that the non-military weapons displayed were illegal firearms confiscated from criminals in northern Maseru. In addition to the guns, authorities also displayed confiscated police uniforms, and oddly, blankets and

MASERU 00000452 002.2 OF 002

mattresses.

Inconvenient Inconsistencies

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: If accurate, reports about the South African Government's provision of asylum, even temporarily, for men accused in the June 2007 attacks on ministerial residences in Maseru could prove to be an issue in the South Africa-Lesotho bilateral relationship. Reportedly, opposition leader Thomas Thabane has strong personal ties to President Mbeki, and Thabane's election campaign received an unusual amount of attention in the South African press and support from Basotho residents in South Africa. The GOL's display of recovered weaponry, while an obvious victory for the nation's security organs, raises the inconsistency of the continued arrest of individuals related to the nation's legal political opposition (the ABC party) while those caught with the weapons appear to come from different factions (the aging and, until now, seemingly defunct Lesotho Liberation Army). The South African asylum cases and aggressive reporting from media outlets such as "Public Eye" may soon force the GOL to come to terms with these inconsistencies. END COMMENT.
MURPHY